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"Taste"



Paul Vonderlage/Diversions

The last cool place in town

By Geoff McMurtry

OK, so, two classes down and one to go and two hours to kill. There's probably just enough time to read that chapter that was assigned this morning. The one for tomorrow. Nah, me neither.

So, how to waste time constructively? Could go to a bar. No, one of the things old men do, that brands them distinctively as old men, is sit around in bars during the day. No sense getting old before my time.

Could go home and have a beer. Too far to walk. Need to do something close by. I could eat today. Now there's a thought. A quick inventory of my wallet reveals several scraps of paper with illegible lists of things to do today written on them. They're all too faded and beat up to read. Check the reserve tanks.

The left front pocket holds a crumpled dollar bill, four pennies and a dime. The right pocket offers another stupid list, a phone number, some keys, three colors of lint . . . VOILA! another crumpled dollar bill. Two dollars and 14 cents. Looks like a McTaco again.

But wait! There's hope. Walking past Kinko's jolts the dim recesses of memory. This used to be a sandwich place, didn't it? Big sandwiches, and cheap. And video games were two plays for a quarter. It was called Tommy's, if I remember correctly, and I probably put enough quarters into Tommy's Galaga machine to pay tuition for the average strangely lettered household. But where

could you find a place like that today?

Well, it isn't easy, but in the Gunny's building is a pleasant little establishment called the Loft. Just go in the door in front of Daylight Donuts, take a left and climb the stairs.

Owned and operated by Bob Petersen, the Loft is an attempt to recreate Tommy's unique atmosphere and position as a stopoff or hangout between or after classes. Even now, several students conquer space, defend the galaxy, fight off marauding hordes or just mindlessly blow things up while three others talk about their calc test as they munch on a sandwich. That was what Tommy's was all about, and, for the most part, so is the Loft.

The sandwiches are very good and large enough to get most anyone through the day. The bread is fresh, the meat is the good stuff (no bologna or Spam), and you can get extras like lettuce and tomatoes, and top it off with melted cheese, and you've got a sandwich. Prices started at \$1.19 for pepperoni and cheese and go up to \$1.90 for pepperoni, ham roast and cheese. There are 10 varieties of meats and six kinds of cheeses, including a mild spicy cheese called friendly onion that is highly recommended. Also, for

the adventurous, Bob has a chili that he guarantees will raise your temperature, and he won't feel right if it doesn't.

The clientele is mostly students, maybe a friendly wino now and then, with the busiest time being around midnight during the week, when the college bar crowd comes in, and early Friday evening, when high-school students come out and play. The open hours are being rescheduled, but for now it's open from 10:30 a.m. to 1 a.m., Monday to Saturday.

The connection to Tommy's is no coincidence. Bob was an owner and manager there, but the business dissolved amidst the land trades between the Nebraska Bookstore and the Lied Center. Compared to Tommy's, business at the Loft has been somewhat slower because of the move but is starting to pick up again, almost completely by word of mouth, and with almost no advertising budget.

The Loft isn't as spacious and doesn't have the two-leveled atmosphere that Tommy's did, but it is comfortable and has an upstairs window, and most games are still two plays for a quarter.

And it's still a pretty good place to get a sandwich and a Coke, read the paper and blow up a few spaceships for less than \$2.



John Bruce/Diversions